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THE ŒDIPUS-COMPLEX AS AN EXPLANATION OF HAMLET'S MYSTERY: A STUDY IN MOTIVE

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English-speaking psychologists have as yet paid relatively little attention to the study of genius and of artistic creativeness, at least so far as the method of analysing in detail the life-history of individual men of genius is concerned. In Germany, stimulated by Moebius' example, many workers have obtained valuable results by following this biographical line of investigation. Within the past few years this study has been infused with fresh interest by the luminous writings of Professor Freud, who has laid bare some of the fundamental mechanisms by which artistic and poetic creativeness proceeds.¹ He has shewn that the main characteristics of these mechanisms are common to many apparently dissimilar mental processes, such as dreams, wit, psycho-neurotic symptoms, etc.² and further that all these processes bear an intimate relation to fantasy, to the realisation of non-conscious wishes, to psychological "repression" (*Verdrängung*), to the re-awakening of childhood memories, and to the psycho-sexual life of the subject. His analysis of Jensen's novel *Gradiva* will serve as a model to all future studies of the kind.

It is generally recognised that although great writers and poets have frequently made the most penetrating generalisations in practical psychology, the world has always been slow to profit by their discoveries. Of the various reasons for this fact one may here be mentioned, for it is cognate to the present argument. It is that the artist is often not distinctly aware of the real meaning of what he is seeking to express, and is never aware of its source. The difficulty experienced by the artist in arriving at the precise meaning of the creation to which he is labouring to give birth has been brilliantly demonstrated by Bernard Shaw³ in the case of Ibsen and Wagner. The artist

¹ Freud: *Der Wahn und die Träume in W. Jensen's Gradiva*, 1907. *Der Dichter und das Phantasieren*. Neue Revue, 1908. No. 10, S. 716.

² Freud: *Traumdeutung*, 1900. *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten*, 1905. *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, 1905. *Sammlung kleiner Schriften zur Neurosenlehre*, 1906. Zweite Folge, etc.

³ Bernard Shaw: *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, 1891. *The Perfect Wagnerite*. 2nd ed., 1901.

works under the impulsion of an apparently external force; indeed, being unaware of the origin of his inspiration, it frequently happens that he ascribes it to an actual external agency, divine or otherwise. We now know that this origin is to be found in mental processes which have been forgotten by the subject, but which are still operative; in Freud's language, the creative output is a sublimated manifestation of various thwarted and "repressed" wishes, of which the subject is no longer conscious. The artist, therefore, gives expression to the creative impulse in a form which satisfies his internal need, but in terms which he cannot translate into easily comprehensible language; he must express it directly as it feels to him, and without taking into consideration his possible audience. An evident corollary of this is that the farther away the artist's meaning from the minds of those not in possession of any of his inspiration the more difficult and open to doubt is the interpretation of it; hence the flood of quite silly criticism that follows in the wake of such men as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

It is to be expected that the knowledge so laboriously gained by the psycho-analytic method of investigation would prove of great value in the attempt to solve the psychological problems concerned with the obscurer motives of human action and desire. In fact one can see no other scientific mode of approach to such problems than through the patient unravelling of the deeper and hidden layers of the mind by means of the dissecting procedures employed in this method. The stimulating results already obtained by Muthmann,¹ Rank,² Riklin,³ Sadger,⁴ Abraham⁵ and others are only a foretoken of the applications that will be possible when this method has been employed over a larger field than has hitherto been the case.

The particular problem of Hamlet, with which this paper is concerned, is intimately related to some of the most frequently recurring problems that are presented in the course of psychoanalysis, and it has thus seemed possible to secure a new point of view from which an answer might be offered to questions that have baffled attempts made along less technical routes. Some of the most competent literary authorities have freely acknowledged the inadequacy of all the solutions of the prob-

¹Muthmann: Psychiatrisch-Theologische Grenzfragen. Zeitschr. f. Religions-psychologie. Bd. I. Ht. 2 u. 3.

²Otto Rank: Der Künstler. Ansätze zu einer Sexual-psychologie, 1907. Der Mythos von der Geburt des Helden, 1909.

³Riklin: Wunscherfüllung und Symbolik im Märchen, 1908.

⁴Sadger: Konrad Ferdinand Meyer. Eine pathographisch-psychologische Studie, 1908. Aus dem Liebesleben Nicolaus Lenaus, 1909.

⁵Abraham: Traum und Mythos. Eine Studie zur Völkerpsychologie, 1909.

lem that have up to the present been offered, and from a psychological point of view this inadequacy is still more evident. The aim of the present paper is to expound an hypothesis which Freud some nine years ago suggested in one of the footnotes to his *Traumdeutung*,¹ so far as I am aware it has not been critically discussed since its publication. Before attempting this it will be necessary to make a few general remarks about the nature of the problem and the previous solutions that have been offered.

The problem presented by the tragedy of Hamlet is one of peculiar interest in at least two respects. In the first place the play is almost universally considered to be the chief masterpiece of one of the greatest minds the world has known. It probably expresses the core of Shakspeare's philosophy and outlook on life as no other work of his does, and so far excels all his other writings that many competent critics would place it on an entirely separate level from them. It may be expected, therefore, that anything which will give us the key to the inner meaning of the play will necessarily give us the clue to much of the deeper workings of Shakspeare's mind. In the second place the intrinsic interest of the play is exceedingly great. The central mystery in it, namely the cause of Hamlet's hesitancy in seeking to obtain revenge for the murder of his father, has well been called the Sphinx of modern Literature.² It has given rise to a regiment of hypotheses, and to a large library of critical and controversial literature; this is mainly German and for the most part has grown up in the past fifty years. No review of the literature will here be attempted, for this is obtainable in the writings of Loening,³ Döring,⁴ and others, but the main points of view that have been adopted must be briefly mentioned.

Of the solutions that have been offered many will probably live on account of their very extravagance.⁵ Allied if not belonging to this group are the hypotheses that see in Hamlet allegorical tendencies of various kinds. Thus Gerth⁶ sees in

¹ S. 183.

² It is but fitting that Freud should have solved the riddle of this Sphinx, as he has that of the Theban one.

³ Loening: *Die Hamlet-Tragödie* Shakespeares, 1893. This book is warmly to be recommended, for it is by far the most critical work on the subject.

⁴ Döring: *Ein Jahrhundert deutscher Hamlet-Kritik*. Die Kritik, 1897, Nr. 131.

⁵ Such, for instance, is the view developed by Vining (*The Mystery of Hamlet*, 1881) that Hamlet's weakness is to be explained by the fact that he was a woman wrongly brought up as a man.

⁶ Gerth: *Der Hamlet von Shakespeare*, 1861.

the play an elaborate defence of Protestantism, Rio¹ and Spanier² on the contrary a defence of Roman Catholicism. Stedefeld³ regards it as a protest against the scepticism of Montaigne, Feis⁴ as one against his mysticism and bigotry. A writer under the name of Mercade⁵ maintains that the play is an allegorical philosophy of history; Hamlet is the spirit of truth-seeking which realises itself historically as progress, Claudius is the type of evil and error, Ophelia is the Church, Polonius its Absolutism and Tradition, the Ghost is the ideal voice of Christianity, Fortinbras is Liberty, and so on. Many writers, including Plumptre⁶ and Silberschlag,⁷ have read the play as a satire on Mary, Queen of Scots, and her marriage with Bothwell after the murder of Darnley, while Elze,⁸ Isaac,⁹ and others have found in it a relation to the Earl of Essex's domestic history. Such hypotheses overlook the great characteristic of all Shakspeare's works, namely the absence in them of any conscious tendencies, allegorical or otherwise. In his capacity to describe human conduct directly as he observed it, and without any reference to the past or future evolution of motive, lay at the same time his strength and his weakness. In a more conscious age than his or ours Shakspeare's works would necessarily lose much of their interest.

The most important hypotheses that have been put forward are sub-varieties of three main points of view. The first of these sees the difficulty in the performance of the task in Hamlet's temperament, which is not suited to effective action of any kind; the second sees it in the nature of the task, which is such as to be almost impossible of performance by any one; and the third in some special feature in the nature of the task which renders it peculiarly difficult or repugnant to Hamlet.

The *first* of these views, which would trace the inhibition

¹Rio: Shakespeare, 1864.

²Spanier: Der "Papist" Shakespeare im Hamlet, 1890.

³Stedefeld: Hamlet, ein Tendenzdrama Shakespeares gegen die skeptische und kosmopolitische Weltanschauung des M. de Montaigne, 1871.

⁴Feis: Shakspeare and Montaigne, 1884. The importance of Montaigne's influence on Shakspeare, as shewn in Hamlet, was first remarked by Sterling (London and Westminster Review, 1838, p. 321), and has been clearly pointed out by J. M. Robertson in his book, Montaigne and Shakspeare, 1897.

⁵Mercade: Hamlet; or Shakespeare's Philosophy of History, 1875.

⁶Plumptre: Observations on Hamlet, being an attempt to prove that Shakespeare designed his tragedie as an indirect censure on Mary, Queen of Scots, 1796.

⁷Silberschlag: Shakespeare's Hamlet. Morgenblatt, 1860, Nr. 46, 47.

⁸Elze: Shakespeare's Jahrbuch, Bd. III.

⁹Isaac: Shakespeare's Jahrbuch, Bd. XVI.

to some defect in Hamlet's constitution, was independently elaborated more than a century ago by Goethe,¹ Schlegel² and Coleridge.³ Owing mainly to Goethe's advocacy it has been the most widely-held view of Hamlet, though in different hands it has undergone innumerable modifications. Goethe promulgated the view as a young man and when under the influence of Herder,⁴ who later abandoned it.⁵ It essentially maintains that Hamlet, for temperamental reasons, was fundamentally incapable of decisive action of any kind. These temperamental reasons are variously described by different writers, by Coleridge as "overbalance in the contemplative faculty," by Schlegel as "reflective deliberation—often a pretext to cover cowardice and lack of decision," by Vischer⁶ as "melancholic disposition," and so on. A view fairly representative of the pure Goethe school would run as follows: Owing to his highly developed intellectual powers, and his broad and many-sided sympathies, Hamlet could never take a simple view of any question, but always saw a number of different aspects and possible explanations of every problem. A given course of action never seemed to him unequivocal and obvious, so that in practical life his scepticism and reflective powers paralysed his conduct. He thus stands for what may roughly be called the type of an intellect over-developed at the expense of the will, and in Germany he has frequently been held up as a warning example to university professors who shew signs of losing themselves in abstract trains of thought at the expense of contact with reality.⁷

There are at least three grave objections to this view of Hamlet's hesitancy, one based on general psychological considerations and the others on objective evidence furnished by the play. It is true that at first sight increasing scepticism and reflexion apparently tend to weaken motive, in that they tear aside common illusions as to the value of certain lines of

¹ Goethe: *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre*, 1795.

² Schlegel: *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Litteratur*, III, 1809.

³ Coleridge: *Lectures on Shakespeare*, 1808.

⁴ Herder: *Von deutscher Art und Kunst*, 1773.

⁵ Herder: *Aufsatz über Shakespeare im dritten Stück der Adrastea*, 1801.

⁶ Vischer: *Kritische Gänge*. N. F., Ht. 2, 1861.

⁷ See for instance Köstlin: *Shakespeare und Hamlet*. *Morgenblatt*, 1864, Nr. 25, 26. Already in 1816 Börne in his *Dramaturgischen Blättern* had cleverly developed this idea. He closes one article with the words "Hätte ein Deutscher den Hamlet gemacht, so würde ich mich gar nicht darüber wundern. Ein Deutscher braucht nur eine schöne, leserliche Hand dazu. Er schreibt sich ab und Hamlet ist fertig."

conduct. This is well seen, for instance, in a matter such as social reform, where a man's energy in carrying out minor philanthropic undertakings wanes in proportion to the amount of clear thought he devotes to the subject. But closer consideration will shew that this debilitation is a qualitative rather than a quantitative one. Scepticism leads to a simplification of motive in general, and to a reduction in the number of those motives that are efficacious; it brings about a lack of adherence to certain conventional ones rather than a general failure in the springs of action. Every student of clinical psychology knows that any such general weakening in energy is invariably due to another cause than intellectual scepticism, namely, to the functioning of abnormal unconscious complexes. This train of thought need not here be further developed, for it is really irrelevant to discuss the cause of Hamlet's general aboulia if, as will presently be maintained, this did not exist; the argument, then, must remain unconvincing except to those who already accept it. Attempts to attribute Hamlet's general aboulia to less constitutional causes, such as to grief due to the death of his father and adultery of his mother,¹ are similarly inefficacious, for psycho-pathology has clearly demonstrated that such grief is in itself quite inadequate as an explanation of this condition.

Unequivocal evidence of the inadequacy of the hypothesis under discussion may further be obtained from perusal of the play. In the first place there is every reason to believe that, apart from the task in question, Hamlet is a man capable of very decisive action. This could be not only impulsive, as in the killing of Polonius, but deliberate, as in the arranging for the death of Guildenstern and Rosencrantz. His biting scorn and mockery towards his enemies, and even towards Ophelia, his cutting denunciation of his mother, his lack of remorse after the death of Polonius, are not signs of a gentle, yielding or weak nature. His mind was as rapidly made up about the organisation of the drama to be acted before his uncle, as it was resolutely made up when the unpleasant task had to be performed of breaking with the uncongenial Ophelia. He shews no trace of hesitation when he stabs the listener behind the curtain,² when he makes his violent onslaught on the pirates, leaps into the grave with Laertes or accepts his challenge to the fencing match, or when he follows his father's ghost on to the battlements; nor is there any lack of determination in his resolution to meet the ghost;

¹ A suggestion first proffered by Herder. *Op. cit.*, 1801.

² I find Loening's argument quite conclusive that Hamlet did not have the king in his mind when he committed this deed. (*Op. cit.*, S., 242-244, 362-363.)

"I'll speak to it, though hell itself should gape
And bid me hold my peace,"

or in his cry when Horatio clings to him,

"Unhand me, gentlemen;
By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me;
I say, away!"

On none of these occasions do we find any sign of that paralysis of doubt which has so frequently been imputed to him. On the contrary, not once is there any sort of failure in moral or physical courage except only in the matter of the revenge. In the second place, as will later be expounded, Hamlet's attitude is never that of a man who feels himself not equal to the task, but rather that of a man who for some reason cannot bring himself to perform his plain duty. The whole picture is not, as Goethe depicted, that of a gentle soul crushed beneath a colossal task, but that of a strong man tortured by some mysterious inhibition.

Already in 1827 a protest was raised by Hermes¹ against Goethe's interpretation, and since then a number of hypotheses have been put forward in which Hamlet's temperamental deficiencies are made to play a very subordinate part. The *second* view here discussed goes in fact to the opposite extreme, and finds in the difficulty of the task itself the sole reason for the non-performance of it. This view was first hinted by Fletcher,² and was independently developed by Klein³ and Werder.⁴ It maintains that the extrinsic difficulties inherent in the task were so stupendous as to have deterred any one, however determined. To do this it is necessary to conceive the task in a different light from that in which it usually is conceived. As a development largely of the Hegelian teachings on the subject of abstract justice, Klein, and to a lesser extent Werder, contended that the essence of Hamlet's revenge consisted not merely in slaying the murderer, but of convicting him of his crime in the eyes of the nation. The argument, then, runs as follows: The nature of Claudius' crime was so frightful and so unnatural as to render it incredible unless supported by a very considerable body of evidence. If Hamlet had simply slain his uncle, and then proclaimed, without a shred of supporting evidence, that he had done it to avenge a fratricide, the nation would infallibly have cried out upon him, not only

¹ Hermes: Ueber Shakespeare's Hamlet und seine Beurteiler, 1827.

² Fletcher: Westminster Review, Sept., 1845.

³ Klein: Emil Devrient's Hamlet. Berliner Modenspiegel, eine Zeitschrift für die elegante Welt, 1846, Nr. 23, 24.

⁴ Werder: Vorlesungen über Shakespeare's Hamlet, 1875. Translated by E. Wilder, 1907, under the title of "The Heart of Hamlet's Mystery."

for murdering his uncle to seize the throne himself, but also for selfishly seeking to cast an infamous slur on the memory of a man who could no longer defend his honour. This would have resulted in the sanctification of the uncle, and so the frustration of the revenge. In other words it was the difficulty not so much of the act itself that deterred Hamlet as of the situation that would necessarily result from the act.

Thanks mainly to Werder's ingenious presentation of this view, several prominent critics, including Rolfe,¹ Corson,² Furness,³ Hudson⁴ and Halliwell-Phillips⁵ have given it their adherence. It has not found much favour in the Hamlet-literature itself, and has been crushingly refuted by a number of able critics, particularly by Tolman,⁶ Loening,⁷ Hebler,⁸ Ribbeck,⁹ Bradley,¹⁰ Baumgart,¹¹ and Bulthaupt.¹² I need, therefore, do no more than mention one or two of the objections that can be raised to it. It will be seen that to support this hypothesis the task has in two respects been made to appear more difficult than is really the case; first it is assumed to be not a simple revenge in the ordinary sense of the word, but a complicated bringing to judgement in a more or less legal way; and secondly the importance of the external obstacles have been exaggerated. This distortion of the meaning of the revenge is purely gratuitous and has no warrant in any passage of the play, or elsewhere where the word is used in Shakspeare.¹³ Hamlet never doubted that he was the legitimately appointed instrument of punishment, and when at the end of the play he secures his revenge, the dramatic situation is correctly resolved, although the nation is not even informed, let alone convinced, of the murder that is being avenged. To secure evidence that would convict the uncle in a court of law was from the nature of the case impossible, and no tragical situation can arise from an attempt to achieve the impossible, nor can the interest of

¹ Rolfe: Introduction to the English Translation of Werder, 1907.

² Corson: Cited by Rolfe. *Loc. cit.*

³ Furness: A New Var. Ed. of Shakespeare, Vol. III and IV, 1877.

⁴ Hudson: Shakespeare's Life, Art, and Characters, 2nd ed., 1882.

⁵ Halliwell-Phillips: Memoranda on the tragedy of Hamlet, 1879.

⁶ Tolman: Views about Hamlet and Other Essays, 1904.

⁷ Loening: *Op. cit.*, S. 110-113 and 220-224.

⁸ Hebler: Aufsätze über Shakespeare, 2^e Ausg., 1874, S. 258-278.

⁹ Ribbeck: Hamlet und seine Ausleger, 1891, S. 567.

¹⁰ Bradley: Shakespearian Tragedy, 1904, Art. Hamlet.

¹¹ Baumgart: Die Hamlet-Tragödie und ihre Kritik, 1877, S. 7-29.

¹² Bulthaupt: Dramaturgie des Schauspiels, 4^e Aufl., 1891, II, S. 237.

¹³ Loening: (*Op. cit.*, Cap. VI), has made a detailed study of the significance of revenge in Shakspeare's period and as illustrated throughout his works; his conclusion on the point admits of no questioning.

the spectator be aroused for an obviously one-sided struggle. The external situation is similarly distorted for the needs of this hypothesis. On which side the people would have been in any conflict is clearly enough perceived by Claudius, who dare not even punish Hamlet for killing Polonius. (Act IV, Sc. 3.)

"Yet must not we put the strong law on him ;
He 's loved of the distracted multitude,
Who like not in their judgment, but in their eyes ;"

and again in Act IV, Sc. 7,

"The other motive,
Why to a public count I might not go,
Is the great love the general gender bear him ;
Who, dipping all his faults in their affection,
Would, like the spring that turneth wood to stone,
Convert his gyves to graces ; so that my arrows,
Too slightly timber'd for so loud a wind,
Would have reverted to my bow again,
And not where I had aim'd them."

The ease with which the people could be roused against Claudius is well demonstrated after Polonius' death, when Laertes carried them with him in an irresistible demand for vengeance, which would promptly have been consummated had not the king convinced the avenger that he was innocent. Here the people, the "false Danish dogs" whose loyalty to Claudius was so feather-light that they gladly hailed as king even Laertes, a man who had no sort of claim on the throne, were ready enough to believe in the murderous guilt of their monarch without any shred of supporting evidence, when the accusation was not even true, and where no motive for murder could be discerned at all approaching in weight the two powerful ones that had actually led him to kill his brother. Where Laertes succeeded, it is not likely that Hamlet, the darling of the people, would have failed. Can we not imagine the march of events during the play before the court had Laertes been at the head instead of Hamlet ; the straining observation of the fore-warned nobles, the starting-up of the guilty monarch who can bear the spectacle no longer, the open murmuring of the audience, the resistless impeachment by the avenger, and the instant execution effected by him and his devoted friends ? Indeed, the whole Laertes episode seems almost to have been purposely woven into the drama so as to shew the world how a pious son should really deal with his father's murderer, how possible was the vengeance under these particular circumstances, and by contrast to illuminate the ignoble vacillation of Hamlet whose honour had been doubly wounded by the same treacherous villain.

Most convincing proof of all that the tragedy cannot be

interpreted as residing in difficulties produced by the external situation is Hamlet's own attitude toward his task. He never behaves as a man confronted with a straight-forward task, in which there are merely external difficulties to overcome. If this had been the case surely he would from the first have confided in Horatio and his other friends who so implicitly believed in him, and would deliberately have set to work with them to formulate plans by means of which these obstacles might be overcome. Instead of this he never makes any serious attempt to deal with the external situation, and indeed throughout the play makes no concrete reference to it as such, even in the significant prayer scene when he had every opportunity for disclosing the reasons for his non-action. There is therefore no escape from the conclusion that so far as the external situation is concerned the task was a possible one.

If Hamlet is a man capable of action, and the task is one capable of achievement, what then can be the reason that he does not execute it? Critics who have realised the inadequacy of the above-mentioned hypotheses have been hard pressed to answer this question. Some, struck by Klein's suggestion that the task is not really what it is generally supposed to be, have offered novel interpretations of it. Thus Mauerhof¹ maintains that the Ghost's command to Hamlet was not to kill the king but to put an end to the life of depravity his mother was still leading, and that Hamlet's problem was how to do this without tarnishing her fair name. Dietrich² put forward the singular view that Hamlet's task was to restore to Fortinbras the lands that had been unjustly filched from the latter's father. When straits such as these are reached it is no wonder that many competent critics have taken refuge in the conclusion that the tragedy is in its essence inexplicable, incongruous and incoherent. This view, first sustained in 1846 by Rapp,³ has been developed by a number of writers, including Rümelin⁴, Benedix⁵, Von Friefen⁶, and many others. The causes of the dramatic imperfection of the play have been variously stated, by Dowden⁷ as a conscious interpolation by Shakspeare of some secret, by Reichel⁸ as the defacement by an

¹ Mauerhof: Ueber Hamlet, 1882.

² Dietrich: Hamlet, der Konstel der Vorsehung; eine Shakspeare-Studie, 1883.

³ Rapp: Shakspeare's Schauspiele übersetzt und erläutert. Bd. VIII, 1846.

⁴ Rümelin: Shakspeare-Studien, 1866.

⁵ Benedix: Die Shakspearomanie, 1873.

⁶ Von Friefen: Briefe über Shakspeare's Hamlet, 1864.

⁷ Dowden: Shakspeare; his development in his works, 1875.

⁸ Reichel: Shakspeare-Litteratur, 1887.

uneducated actor called Shakspere of a play by an unknown poet called Shakespeare, etc. Many upholders of this conclusion have consoled themselves that in this very obscurity, so characteristic of life in general, lies the power and attractiveness of the play. Even Grillparzer¹ saw in its impenetrability the reason for its colossal effectiveness; he adds "Dadurch wird es zu einem getreuen Bild der Weltbegebenheiten und wirkt ebenso ungeheuer als diese." Now, vagueness and obfuscation may or may not be characteristic of life in general, but they are certainly not the attributes of a successful drama. No disconnected and meaningless drama could have produced the effects on its audiences that Hamlet has continuously done for the past three centuries. The underlying meaning of the drama may be totally obscure, but that there is one, and one which touches on problems of vital interest to the human heart, is empirically demonstrated by the uniform success with which the drama appeals to the most diverse audiences. To hold the contrary is to deny all the canons of dramatic art accepted since the time of Aristotle. Hamlet as a masterpiece stands or falls by these canons.

We are compelled then to take the position that there is some cause for Hamlet's vacillation which has not yet been fathomed. If this lies neither in his incapacity for action in general, nor in the inordinate difficulty of the task in question, then it must of necessity lie in the *third* possibility, namely in some special feature of the task that renders it repugnant to him. This conclusion, that Hamlet at heart does not want to carry out the task, seems so obvious that it is hard to see how any critical reader of the play could avoid making it.² Some of the direct evidence for it furnished in the play will presently be brought forward when we discuss the problem of the cause for his repugnance, but it will first be necessary to mention some of the views that have been expressed on this subject. The first writer clearly to recognise that Hamlet was a man not baffled in his endeavours but struggling in an internal conflict was Ulrici³ in 1839. The details of Ulrici's hypothesis, which like Klein's, originated in the Hegelian views of morality, are hard to follow, but the essence of it is the contention that Hamlet gravely doubted the moral legitimacy of revenge. He was thus plunged in a struggle between his natural tendency to avenge his father and his highly developed ethical

¹ Grillparzer: Studien zur Litterargeschichte, 3^e Ausg., 1880.

² Anyone who doubts this conclusion is recommended to read Loening's convincing chapter (XII), "Hamlet's Verhalten gegen seiner Aufgabe."

³ Ulrici: Shakespeare's dramatische Kunst; Geschichte und Charakteristik des Shakespeare'schen Dramas, 1839.

and Christian views, which forbade the indulging of this instinctive desire. This hypothesis has been much developed of late years, most extensively by Liebau,¹ Mézières,² Gerth,³ Baumgart,⁴ and Robertson,⁵ on moral, ethical and religious lines. Kohler⁶ ingeniously transferred the conflict to the sphere of jurisprudence, maintaining that Hamlet was in advance of his time in recognising the superiority of legal punishment to private revenge, and was thus a fighter in the van of progress. This special pleading has been effectually refuted by Loening⁷ and Fuld,⁸ and is contradicted by all historical considerations. Finally Schipper⁹ and, more recently, Gelber¹⁰ have suggested that the conflict was a purely intellectual one, in that Hamlet was unable to satisfy himself of the adequacy or reliability of the Ghost's evidence.

The obvious question that one puts to the upholders of any of the above hypotheses is: why did Hamlet in his monologues give us no indication of the nature of the conflict in his mind? As we shall presently see, he gave several excuses for his hesitancy, but never once did he hint at any doubt about what his duty was in the matter. He was always clear enough about what he *ought* to do; the conflict in his mind ranged about the question why he could n't bring himself to do it. If Hamlet had at any time been asked whether it was right for him to kill his uncle, or whether he definitely intended to do so, no one can seriously doubt what his instant answer would have been. Throughout the play we see his mind irrevocably made up as to the necessity of a given course of action, which he fully accepts as being his bounden duty; indeed, he would have resented the mere insinuation of doubt on this point as an untrue slur on his filial piety. Ulrici, Baumgart and Kohler try to meet this difficulty by assuming that the ethical objection to personal revenge was never clearly

¹ Liebau: Studien über William Shakespeares Trauerspiel Hamlet. Date not stated.

² Mézières: Shakspeare, ses oeuvres et ses critiques, 1860.

³ Gerth: *Op. cit.*

⁴ Baumgart: *Op. cit.*

⁵ Robertson: Montaigne and Shakspeare, 1897, p. 129.

⁶ Kohler: Shakespeare vor dem Forum der Jurisprudenz, 1883, and Zur Lehre von der Blutrache, 1885. See also Zeitschr. f. vergleichende Rechtswissenschaft, Bd. V, S. 330.

⁷ Loening: Zeitschrift für die gesamte Strafrechtswissenschaft, Bd. V, S. 191.

⁸ Fuld: Shakespeare und die Blutrache. Dramaturgische Blätter und Bühnen-Rundschau, 1888, Nr. 44.

⁹ Schipper: Shakespeare's Hamlet; æsthetische Erläuterung des Hamlet, etc., 1862.

¹⁰ Gelber: Shakespeare'sche Probleme, Plan und Einheit im Hamlet. 1891.

present to Hamlet's mind; it was a deep and undeveloped feeling that had not fully dawned. I would agree that in no other way can the difficulty be logically met, and further, that in the recognition of Hamlet's non-consciousness of the cause of the repugnance to his task we are nearing the core of the mystery. But an invincible difficulty in the way of accepting any of the causes of repugnance suggested above is that the nature of them is such that a keen and introspective thinker, as Hamlet was, would infallibly have recognised them, and would have openly debated them instead of deceiving himself with a number of false pretexts in the way we shall presently mention. Loening¹ well states this in the sentence: "Handelt es sich um einen Konflikt zwischen der von aussen gebotenen Rachepflicht und einer inneren *sittlichen* oder *rechtlichen* Gegenströmung, so *muss* dieser Zwiespalt und seine Ursache bei einem so denkkräftigen und ans Denken gewohnten Menschen wie Hamlet zur Reflexion gebracht werden."

In spite of this difficulty the hint of an approaching solution encourages us to pursue more closely the argument at that point. The hypothesis stated above may be correct up to a certain stage and then have failed for lack of special knowledge to guide it further. Thus Hamlet's hesitancy may have been due to an internal conflict between the need to fulfil his task on the one hand, and some special cause of repugnance to it on the other; further, the explanation of his not disclosing this cause of repugnance may be that he was not conscious of its nature; and yet the cause may be one that doesn't happen to have been considered by any of the upholders of the hypothesis. In other words the first two stages in the argument may be correct, but not the third. This is the view that will now be developed, but before dealing with the third stage in the argument it is first necessary to establish the probability of the first two, namely that Hamlet's hesitancy was due to some special cause of repugnance for his task, and that he was unaware of the nature of this repugnance.

A preliminary obstruction to this line of thought, based on some common prejudices on the subject of mental dynamics, may first be considered. If Hamlet was not aware of the cause of his inhibition, doubt may be felt as to the possibility of our penetrating to it. This pessimistic thought was thus expressed by Baumgart:² "Das was ihn—Hamlet—an der Rache hindert, ist ihm selbst ein Problem und *deshalb* musste es für uns alle ein Problem bleiben." Fortunately for our investigation, however, psycho-analytic study has proved beyond doubt that

¹ Loening: *Die Hamlet-Tragödie Shakespeares*, 1893, S. 78.

² Baumgart: *Op. cit.* S. 48.

mental trends hidden from the subject himself may come to external expression in a way that reveals their nature to a trained observer, so that the possibility of success is not to be thus excluded. Loening¹ has further objected that the poet himself has not revealed this hidden mental trend, or even given any indication of it. The first part of this objection is certainly true, otherwise there would be no problem to discuss, but we shall presently see that the second is by no means true. It may be asked: why has the poet not put in a clearer light the mental trend we are trying to discover? Strange as it may appear, the answer is the same as in the case of Hamlet himself, namely, he could not, because he was unaware of its nature. We shall later deal with this matter in connection with the relation of the poet to the play. But, if the motive of the play is so obscure, to what can we attribute its powerful effect on the audience, for, as Kohler² asks, "Wer, der je Hamlet gesehen, hat nicht den furchtbaren Konflikt empfunden, welcher die Seele des Helden bewegt?" This can only be because the hero's conflict finds its echo in a similar inner conflict in the mind of the hearer, and the more intense is this already present conflict the greater is the effect of the drama.³ Again, the hearer himself does not know the inner cause of the conflict in his mind, but experiences only the outer manifestations of it. We thus reach the apparent paradox that the hero, the poet, and the audience are all profoundly moved by feelings due to a conflict of the source of which they are unaware.

The fact, however, that such a conclusion should seem paradoxical is in itself a censure on popular views of the actual workings of the human mind, and, before undertaking to sustain the assertions made in the preceding paragraph, it will first be necessary to make a few observations on prevailing views of motive and conduct in general. The new science of clinical psychology stands nowhere in sharper contrast to the older attitudes towards mental functioning than on this very matter. Whereas the generally accepted view of man's mind, usually implicit and frequently explicit in psychological writings, regards it as an interplay of various processes that are for the most part known to the subject, or are at all events accessible to careful introspection on his part, the analytic methods of clinical psychology have on the contrary decisively

¹ Loening: *Op. cit.*, S. 78, 79.

² Kohler: *Shakespeare vor dem Forum des Jurisprudenz*, 1883, S. 195.

³ It need hardly be said that the play appeals to its audience in a number of different respects. We are here considering only the main appeal, the central conflict in the tragedy.

proved that a far greater number of these processes than is commonly surmised arise from origins that he never suspects. Man's belief that he is a self-conscious animal, alive to the desires that impel or inhibit his actions, and aware of all the springs of his conduct, is the last stronghold of that anthropomorphic outlook on life which so long has dominated his philosophy, his theology and, above all, his psychology. In other words, the tendency to take man at his own valuation is rarely resisted, and we assume that the surest way of finding out why a person does a given thing is simply to ask him, relying on the knowledge that he, like ourselves in a like circumstance, will feel certain of the answer and will infallibly provide a plausible reason for his conduct. Special objective methods of penetrating into obscure mental processes, however, disclose the most formidable obstacles in the way of this direct introspective route, and reveal powers of self-deception in the human mind to which a limit has yet to be found. If I may be allowed to quote from a former paper:¹ "We are beginning to see man not as the smooth, self-acting agent he pretends to be, but as he really is, a creature only dimly conscious of the various influences that mould his thought and action, and blindly resisting with all the means at his command the forces that are making for a higher and fuller consciousness."

That Hamlet is suffering from an internal conflict, the essential nature of which is inaccessible to his introspection, is evidenced by the following considerations. Throughout the play we have the clearest picture of a man who sees his duty plain before him, but who shirks it at every opportunity, and suffers in consequence the most intense remorse. To paraphrase Sir James Paget's famous description of hysterical paralysis: Hamlet's advocates say he cannot do his duty, his detractors say he will not, whereas the truth is that he cannot will. Further than this, the defective will-power is localised to the one question of killing his uncle; it is what may be termed a *specific aboulia*. Now instances of such specific aboulias in real life invariably prove, when analysed, to be due to an unconscious repulsion against the act that cannot be performed. In other words, whenever a person cannot bring himself to do something that every conscious consideration tells him he should do, it is always because for some reason he doesn't want to do it; this reason he will not own to himself and is only dimly if at all aware of. That is exactly the case with Hamlet. Time and again he works himself up,

¹ Rationalisation in Every Day Life. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, Aug.—Sept., 1908, Vol. III, p. 168.

points out to himself his obvious duty, with the cruellest self-reproaches lashes himself to agonies of remorse, and once more falls away into inaction. He eagerly seizes every excuse for occupying himself with any question rather than the performance of his duty, just as on a lesser plane a schoolboy faced with a distasteful task whittles away his time in arranging his books, sharpening his pencils, and fidgeting with any little occupation that will serve as a pretext for putting off the task.

Highly significant is the fact that the grounds Hamlet gives for his hesitancy are grounds none of which will stand a moment's serious consideration, and which continually change from one time to another. One moment he pretends he is too cowardly to perform the deed or that his reason is paralysed by "bestial oblivion," at another he questions the truthfulness of the ghost, in another, when the opportunity presents itself in its naked form, he thinks the time is unsuited,—it would be better to wait till the king was in some evil act and then to kill him, and so on. When a man gives at different times a different reason for his conduct it is safe to infer that, whether purposely or not, he is concealing the true reason. Wetz,¹ discussing a similar problem in reference to Iago, penetratingly observed, "nichts ist ein so guter Beweis für die Unechtheit der Motive, die Iago sich einreden will, als der stete Wechsel dieser Motive." We can therefore safely dismiss all the alleged motives that Hamlet propounds, as being more or less successful attempts on his part to blind himself with self-deception. Loening's² summing-up of them is not too emphatic, when he says, "alle widersprechen sich, es sind samt und sonders falsche und Scheingründe." The more specious the explanation Hamlet puts forth the more easily does it satisfy him, and the more readily will the reader accept it as the real motive. The alleged motives excellently illustrate the mechanisms of psychological evasion and rationalisation I have elsewhere described.³ It is not necessary, however, to discuss them individually, for Loening has with the greatest perspicacity done this in detail, and has effectually demonstrated how utterly untenable they all are.⁴

Still, in his moments of self-reproach Hamlet sees clearly though the recalcitrancy of his conduct, and renews his efforts to achieve action. It is interesting to notice how his out-

¹ Wetz: Shakespeare vom Standpunkt der vergleichenden Litteraturgeschichte, 1890, Bd. I, S. 186.

² Loening: *Op. cit.*, S. 245.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 161.

⁴ See especially his analysis of Hamlet's pretext for non-action in the prayer scene. *Op. cit.*, S. 240-242.

bursts of remorse are evoked by external happenings which bring back to his mind that which he would so gladly forget; particularly effective in this respect are incidents that contrast with his own conduct, as when the player is so moved over the fate of Hecuba (Act II, Sc. 2), or when Fortinbras takes the field and "finds quarrel in a straw when honour's at the stake." (Act IV, Sc. 4.) On the former occasion, stung by the "monstrous" way in which the player pours out his feeling at the thought of Hecuba, he arraigns himself in words which surely should effectually dispose of the view that he has any doubt where his duty lies.

"What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her? What would he do
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears,
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
The very faculties of eyes and ears.
Yet I,
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,¹
And can say nothing; no, not for a king,
Upon whose property and most dear life
A damn'd defeat was made. Am I a coward?
Who calls me villain? breaks my pate across?
Plucks off my beard, and blows it in my face?
Tweaks me by the nose? gives me the lie i' the throat,
As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?
Ha!
'Swounds, I should take it; for it cannot be
But I am pigeon-liver'd, and lack gall
To make oppression bitter; or ere this
I should have fatted all the region kites
With this slave's offal; bloody, bawdy villain!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
O, vengeance!
Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,
And fall a-cursing, like a very drab,
A scullion!"

The readiness with which his guilty conscience is stirred into activity is again evidenced on the second appearance of the Ghost when Hamlet cries,

"Do you not come your tardy son to chide,
That, lapsed in time and passion, lets go by
The important acting of your dread command?
Oh, say!"

The Ghost at once confirms this misgiving by answering,

"Do not forget: this visitation
Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose."

¹ How the very core of the problem is contained in these four words.

In short, the whole picture presented by Hamlet, his deep depression, the hopeless note in his attitude towards the world and towards the value of life, his dread of death,¹ his repeated reference to bad dreams, his self-accusations, his desperate efforts to get away from the thoughts of his duty, and his vain attempts to find an excuse for his recalcitrancy; all this unequivocally points to a tortured conscience, to some hidden ground for shirking his task, a ground which he dare not or cannot avow to himself. We have, therefore, again to take up the argument at this point, and to seek for some evidence that may serve to bring to the light of day the hidden motive.

The extensive experience of the psycho-analytic researches carried out by Freud and his school during the past twenty years has amply demonstrated that certain kinds of mental processes shew a greater tendency to be "repressed" (*verdrängt*) than others. In other words, it is harder for a person to own to himself the existence in his mind of some mental trends than it is of others. In order to gain a correct perspective it is therefore desirable briefly to enquire into the relative frequency with which various sets of mental processes are "repressed." One might in this connection venture the generalisation that those processes are most likely to be "repressed" by the individual which are most disapproved of by the particular circle of society to whose influence he has chiefly been subjected. Biologically stated, this law would run: "That which is unacceptable to the herd becomes unacceptable to the individual unit," it being understood that the term herd is intended in the sense of the particular circle above defined, which is by no means necessarily the community at large. It is for this reason that moral, social, ethical or religious influences are hardly ever "repressed," for as the individual originally received them from his herd, they can never come into conflict with the dicta of the latter. This merely says that a man cannot be ashamed of that which he respects; the apparent exceptions to this need not here be explained. The contrary is equally true, namely that mental trends "repressed" by the individual are those least acceptable to his herd; they are, therefore, those which are, curiously enough, distinguished as "natural" instincts, as contrasted with secondarily acquired mental trends. Loening² seems very discerningly to have grasped this, for, in commenting on a remark of Kohler's to the effect that "Wo uns ein Gefühl zum Handeln oder Unter-

¹Tieck (*Dramaturgische Blätter*, II, 1826) saw in Hamlet's cowardly fear of death a chief reason for his hesitancy in executing his vengeance.

²*Op. cit.*, S. 245, 246.

lassen drängt, da ist es mit hundert Gründen schwanger, mit Gründen, die so leicht sind wie Seifenblasen, aber uns durch Selbstbetrug als höchst respektable, als zwingende Motive erscheinen, weil sie im Hohlspiegel unseres eigenen Gefühls zur riesigen Grösse hinaufgetäuscht werden," he writes "Nur gilt dies nicht, wie Kohler und andere glauben, wenn uns *sittliche*, von der Vernunft *gebilligte* Gefühle drängen (denn diese gestehen wir uns ein, hier bedarf es keines Vorwands), sondern lediglich bei Gefühlen, die aus unserem *Naturell* aufsteigen und deren Befriedigung *der Vernunft widerstreitet*." It only remains to add the obvious corollary that, as the herd unquestionably selects from the "natural" instincts the sexual ones on which to lay its heaviest ban, so is it the various psycho-sexual trends that most often are "repressed" by the individual. We have here an explanation of the clinical experience that the more intense and the more obscure is a given case of deep mental conflict the more certainly will it be found, on adequate analysis, to centre about a sexual problem. On the surface, of course, this does not appear so, for, by means of various psychological defensive mechanisms, the depression, doubt, and other manifestations of the conflict are transferred on to more acceptable subjects, such as the problems of immortality, future of the world, salvation of the soul, and so on.

Bearing these considerations in mind, let us return to Hamlet. It should now be evident that the conflict hypotheses above mentioned, which see Hamlet's "natural" instinct for revenge inhibited by an unconscious misgiving of a highly ethical kind, are based on ignorance of what actually happens in real life, for misgivings of this kind are in fact readily accessible to introspection. Hamlet's self-study would speedily have made him conscious of any such ethical misgivings, and although he might subsequently have ignored them, it would almost certainly have been by the aid of a process of rationalisation which would have enabled him to deceive himself into believing that such misgivings were really ill founded; he would in any case have remained conscious of the nature of them. We must therefore invert these hypotheses, and realise that the positive striving for revenge was to him the moral and social one, and that the suppressed negative striving against revenge arose in some hidden source connected with his more personal, "natural" instincts. The former striving has already been considered, and indeed is manifest in every speech in which Hamlet debates the matter; the second is, from its nature, more obscure and has next to be investigated.

This is perhaps most easily done by inquiring more intently into Hamlet's precise attitude towards the object of his vengeance, Claudius, and towards the crimes that have to be

avenged. These are two, Claudius' incest with the Queen, and his murder of his brother. It is of great importance to note the fundamental difference in Hamlet's attitude towards these two crimes. Intellectually of course he abhors both, but there can be no question as to which arouses in him the deeper loathing. Whereas the murder of his father evokes in him indignation, and a plain recognition of his obvious *duty* to avenge it, his mother's guilty conduct awakes in him the intensest horror. Furnivall¹ well remarks, in speaking of the Queen, "Her disgraceful adultery and incest, and treason to his noble father's memory, Hamlet has felt in his inmost soul. Compared to their ingrain die, Claudius' murder of his father—notwithstanding all his protestations—is only a skin-deep stain." Now, in trying to define Hamlet's attitude towards his uncle we have to guard against assuming offhand that this is a simple one of mere execration, for there is a possibility of complexity arising in the following way: The uncle has not merely committed *each* crime, he has committed *both* crimes, a distinction of considerable importance, for the *combination* of crimes allows the admittance of a new factor, produced by the possible inter-relation of the two, which prevents the result from being simply one of summation. In addition it has to be borne in mind that the perpetrator of the crimes is a relative, and an exceedingly near relative. The possible inter-relation of the crimes, and the fact that the author of them is an actual member of the family on which they were perpetrated, gives scope for a confusion in their influence on Hamlet's mind that may be the cause of the very obscurity we are seeking to clarify.

We must first pursue further the effect on Hamlet of his mother's misconduct. Before he even knows that his father has been murdered he is in the deepest depression, and evidently on account of this misconduct. The connection between the two is unmistakable in the monologue in Act I, Sc. 2, in reference to which Furnivall² writes, "One must insist on this, that before any revelation of his father's murder is made to Hamlet, before any burden of revenging that murder is laid upon him, he thinks of suicide as a welcome means of escape from this fair world of God's, made abominable to his diseased and weak imagination by his mother's lust, and the dishonour done by her to his father's memory."

"O! that this too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew;
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God!

¹ Furnivall: Introduction to the "Leopold" Shakespeare, p. 72.

² Furnivall: *Op. cit.*, p. 70.

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
 Seem to me all the uses of this world!
 Fie on 't! O fie! 't is an unweeded garden
 That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
 Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
 But two months dead! nay, not so much, not two;
 So excellent a king; that was, to this,
 Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother
 That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
 Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
 Must I remember? why, she would hang on him,
 As if increase of appetite had grown
 By what it fed on; and yet, within a month—
 Let me not think on't.—Frailty, thy name is woman!
 A little month! or ere those shoes were old
 With which she follow'd my poor father's body,
 Like Niobe, all tears; why she, even she—
 O God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason,
 Would have mourn'd longer,—married with my uncle,
 My father's brother, but no more like my father
 Than I to Hercules. Within a month?
 Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
 Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
 She married. O, most wicked speed, to post
 With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
 It is not nor it cannot come to good;
 But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue!"

But we can rest satisfied that this seemingly adequate explanation of Hamlet's weariness of life is a complete one only if we unquestionably accept the conventional standards of the causes of deep emotion. The very fact that Hamlet is content with the explanation arouses our gravest suspicions, for, as will presently be explained, from the very nature of the emotion he cannot be aware of the true cause of it. If we ask, not what *ought* to produce such soul-paralysing grief and distaste for life, but what in actual fact *does* produce it, we must go beyond this explanation and seek for some deeper cause. In real life speedy second marriages occur commonly enough without leading to any such result as is here depicted, and when we see them followed by this result we invariably find, if the opportunity for an analysis of the subject's mind presents itself, that there is some other and more hidden reason why the event is followed by this inordinately great effect. The reason always is that the event has awakened to increased activity mental processes that have been "repressed" from the subject's consciousness. His mind has been prepared for the catastrophe by previous mental processes, with which those directly resulting from the event have entered into association. This is perhaps what Furnivall means when he speaks of the world being made abominable to Hamlet's "diseased imagination." Further, to those who have devoted much time to the study of such conditions the self-description given here by

Hamlet will be recognised as a wonderfully accurate picture of a particular mental state that is often loosely and incorrectly classified under the name of "neurasthenia."¹ Analysis of such states always reveals the operative activity of some forgotten group of mental processes, which on account of their unacceptable nature have been "repressed" from the subject's consciousness. Therefore if Hamlet has been plunged into this abnormal state by the news of his mother's second marriage it must be because the news has awakened into activity some slumbering memory, which is so painful that it may not become conscious.

For some deep-seated reason, which is to him unacceptable, Hamlet is plunged into anguish at the thought of his father being replaced in his mother's affection by some one else. It is as though his devotion to his mother had made him so jealous for her affection that he had found it hard enough to share this even with his father, and could not endure to share it with still another man. Against this thought, suggestive as it is, may be urged three objections. First, if it were in itself a full statement of the case, Hamlet would easily have become aware of the jealousy, whereas we have concluded that the mental process we are seeking is hidden from him; secondly, we see in it no evidence of the arousing of an old and forgotten memory; and thirdly, Hamlet is being deprived by Claudius of no greater share of the Queen's affection than he had been by his own father, for the two brothers made exactly similar claims in this respect, namely those of a loved husband. The last-named objection, however, has led us to the heart of the situation. How if, in fact, Hamlet had in years gone by bitterly resented having to share his mother's affection even with his father, had regarded him as a rival, and had secretly wished him out of the way so that he might enjoy undisputed the monopoly of that affection? If such thoughts had been present to him in his child days they evidently would have been gradually suppressed, and all traces of them obliterated, by filial piety and other educative influences. The actual realisation of his early wish in the death of his father would then have stimulated into activity these suppressed memories, which would have produced, in the form of depression and other suffering, an obscure aftermath of his childhood's conflict.

I am aware that to those Shaksperian critics, who have enjoyed no special opportunities for penetrating into the obscurer sides of mental activities, and who base their views of human motive on the surface valuation given by the agents them-

¹ Hamlet's state of mind more accurately corresponds, as Freud has pointed out, with that characteristic of a certain form of hysteria.

selves—to whom all conduct whether good or evil at all events springs from conscious sources,—are likely to regard the suggestions put forward above as merely constituting one more of the extravagant and fanciful hypotheses of which the Hamlet literature in particular is so full. For the sake, however, of those who may be interested to apprehend the point of view from which this strange hypothesis seems probable I feel constrained to interpolate a few considerations on two matters that are not commonly appreciated, namely a child's feelings of jealousy and his ideas on death.

The whole subject of jealousy in children is one which arouses such prejudice that even well-known facts are either ignored or are not estimated at their true significance. Stanley Hall¹ in his encyclopædic treatise makes a number of very just remarks on the importance of the subject in adolescents, but implies that before the age of puberty this passion is of relatively little consequence. The close relation between jealousy and the desire for the removal of a rival by death, as well as the common process of suppression of these feelings, is clearly illustrated in a remark of his to the effect that: "Many a noble and even great man has confessed that mingled with profound grief for the death and misfortune of their best friends, they were often appalled to find a vein of secret joy and satisfaction, as if their own sphere were larger or better." A similar thought is more openly expressed by Bernard Shaw² when he makes Don Juan, in the Hell Scene, remark: "You may remember that on earth—though of course we never confessed it—the death of any one we knew, even those we liked best, was always mingled with a certain satisfaction at being finally done with them." Such cynicism in the adult is exceeded to an incomparable extent by that of the child with its notorious, and to the parents often heartbreaking, egotism, with its undeveloped social instincts and with its ignorance of the dread significance of death. A child unreasoningly interprets the various encroachments on its privileges, and the obstacles interposed to the immediate gratification of its desires, as meaningless cruelty, and the more imperative is the desire that has been thwarted the more pronounced is the hostility towards the agent of this cruelty. For a reason that will presently be mentioned, the most important encroachment in this respect, and the most frequent, is that made on the child's desire for affection. This hostility is very often seen on the occasion of the birth of a subsequent child, and is usually regarded with amusement as an added contribution to the general

¹ Stanley Hall: *Adolescence*, 1908, Vol. I, p. 358.

² Bernard Shaw: *Man and Superman*, 1903, p. 94.

gaiety called forth by the happy event. When a child, on being told that the doctor has brought him another playfellow, responds with the cry "Tell him to take it away again," he intends this, not, as is commonly believed, as a joke for the entertainment of his elders, but as an earnest expression of his intuition that in future he will have to renounce his previously unquestioned pre-eminence in the family circle, a matter that to him is serious enough.

The second matter, on which there is also much misunderstanding, is that of the attitude of a child towards the subject of death, it being commonly assumed that this is necessarily the same as that of an adult. When a child first hears of any one's death, the only part of its meaning that he realises is that the person is *no longer there*,¹ a consummation which in many cases he fervently desires. It is only gradually that the more dread implications of the phenomenon are borne in upon him. When, therefore, a child expresses the wish that a given person, even a near relative, would die, our feelings would not be so shocked as in fact they are, were we to interpret this wish from the point of view of the child. The same remark applies to the frequent dreams of adults in which the death of a near and dear relative takes place, for the wish here expressed is in most cases a long forgotten one, and one no longer directly operative.

Of the infantile jealousies the one with which we are here occupied is that experienced by a boy towards his father. The precise form of early relationship between child and father is in general a matter of vast importance in both sexes, and plays a predominating part in the future development of the child's character; this theme has been brilliantly expounded by Jung² in a recent essay. The only point that at present concerns us is the resentment felt by a boy towards his father when the latter disturbs his enjoyment of his mother's affection. This feeling, which occurs frequently enough, is the deepest source of the world-old conflict between father and son, between the young and old, the favourite theme of so many poets and writers. The fundamental importance that this conflict, and the accompanying breaking away of the child from the authority of his parents, has both for the individual and for society is clearly stated in the following passage of Freud's:³ "Die Ablösung des heranwachsenden Individuums von der Autorität der Elt-

¹ See Freud: *Traumdeutung*, 1900, S. 175.

² Jung: *Die Bedeutung des Vaters für das Schicksal des Einzelnen. Jahrbuch f. psychoanalytische u. psychopathologische Forschungen*. 1909, Bd. I, I. Hälfte.

³ Personal communication quoted by Rank, *Der Mythos von der Geburt des Helden*, 1909, S. 64.

ern ist eine der notwendigsten, aber auch schmerzlichsten Leistungen der Entwicklung. Es ist durchaus notwendig, dass sie sich vollziehe, und man darf annehmen, jeder normal gewordene Mensch habe sie in einem gewissen Mass zu Stande gebracht. Ja, der Fortschritt der Gesellschaft beruht überhaupt auf dieser Gegensätzlichkeit der beiden Generationen." That it rests at bottom on sexual grounds was first demonstrated by Freud,¹ when dealing with the subject of the earliest manifestations of the sexual instinct in children. He has shewn² that this instinct does not, as is generally supposed, differ from other biological functions by suddenly leaping into being at the age of puberty in all its full and developed activity, but that like other functions it undergoes a gradual evolution and only slowly attains the form in which we know it in the adult. In other words a child has to learn how to love just as it has to learn how to run, although the former function is so much more intricate and delicate in its adjustment than the latter that the development of it is a correspondingly slower and more involved process. The earliest sexual manifestations are so palpably non-adapted to what is generally considered the ultimate aim and object of the function, and are so general and tentative in contrast to the relative precision of the later manifestations, that the sexual nature of them is commonly not recognised at all. This theme, important as it is, cannot be further pursued here, but it must be mentioned how frequently these earliest dim awakenings are evoked by the intimate physical relations existing between the child and the persons of his immediate environment, above all, therefore, his parents. As Freud has put it, "The mother is the first seductress of her boy." There is a great variability in both the date and the intensity of the early sexual manifestations, a fact that depends partly on the boy's constitution and partly on the mother's. When the attraction exercised by the mother is excessive it may exert a controlling influence over the boy's later destiny. Of the various results that may be caused by the complicated interaction between this and other influences only one or two need be mentioned. If the awakened passion undergoes but little "repression"—an event most frequent when the mother is a widow—then the boy may remain throughout life abnormally attached to his mother and unable to love any other woman, a not uncommon cause of bachelorhood. He may be gradually weaned from this attachment, if it is less strong, though it often happens

¹ Freud: *Traumdeutung*, 1900, S. 176-180. He has strikingly illustrated the subject in a recent detailed study, "Analyse der Phobie eines fünfjährigen Knaben." *Jahrbuch f. psychoanalytische u. psychopathologische Forschungen*, 1909, Bd. I, 1^o Hälfte.

² Freud: *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, 1905.

that the weaning is incomplete so that he is able to fall in love only with women that resemble the mother; the latter occurrence is a frequent cause of marriage between relatives, as has been interestingly pointed out by Abraham.¹ The maternal influence may also manifest itself by imparting a strikingly tender feminine side to the later character.² When the aroused feeling is intensely "repressed," and associated with shame, guilt, etc., the memory of it may be so completely submerged that it becomes impossible not only to revive it but even to experience any similar feeling, *i. e.*, of attraction for the opposite sex. This may declare itself in pronounced misogyny, or even, when combined with other factors, in actual homosexuality, as Sadger³ has shewn.

The attitude towards the successful rival, namely the father, also varies with the extent to which the aroused feelings have been "repressed." If this is only slight, then the natural resentment against the father may later on be more or less openly manifested, a rebellion which occurs commonly enough, though the original source of it is not recognised. To this source many social revolutionaries owe the original impetus of their rebellion against authority, as can often be plainly traced—for instance in Shelley's case. If the "repression" is more intense, then the hostility towards the father is also concealed; this is usually brought about by the development of the opposite sentiment, namely of an exaggerated regard and respect for him, and a morbid solicitude for his welfare, which completely cover the true underlying relation. The illustration of the attitude of son to parent is so transpicuous in the Œdipus legend,⁴ as developed for instance in Sophocles' tragedy, that the group of mental processes concerned is generally known under the name of the "Œdipus-complex."

We are now in a position to expand and complete the sug-

¹ Abraham: Verwandtenehe und Neurose. Berl. Gesell. f. Psychiatr. u. Nervenkrankh, Nov. 8, 1908. Neurolog. Centralbl., 1908, S. 1150.

² This trait in Hamlet's character has often been the subject of comment. See especially Bodenstedt, Hamlet. Westermann's illustrierte Monatshefte, 1865; we mentioned above Vining's suggestion that Hamlet was really a woman. That the same trait was prominent in Shakspeare himself is well known, a fact which the appellation of "gentle Will" sufficiently recalls.

³ Sadger: Fragment der Psychoanalyse eines Homosexuellen. Jahrbuch f. sex. Zwischenstufen, 1908, Bd. IX. Ist die Konträre Sexualempfindung heilbar? Zeitschr. f. Sexualwissenschaft, Dez., 1908. Zur Ätiologie der konträren Sexualempfindung. Mediz. Klinik, 1909, Nr. 2.

⁴ See Freud: Traumdeutung, 1900, S. 181. Interesting expositions of the mythological aspects of the subject are given by Abraham, Traum und Mythos, 1909, and Rank, *Op. cit.*

gestions offered above in connection with the Hamlet problem.¹ The story thus interpreted would run somewhat as follows: As a child Hamlet had experienced the warmest affection for his mother, and this, as is always the case, had contained elements of a more or less dimly defined erotic quality. The presence of two traits in the Queen's character go to corroborate this assumption, namely her markedly sensual nature, and her passionate fondness for her son. The former is indicated in too many places in the play to need specific reference, and is generally recognised. The latter is equally manifest; as Claudius says (Act IV, Sc. 7, l. 11), "The Queen his mother lives almost by his looks." Hamlet seems, however, to have with more or less success weaned himself from her, and to have fallen in love with Ophelia. The precise nature of his original feeling for Ophelia is a little obscure. We may assume that at least in part it was composed of a normal love for a prospective bride, but there are indications that even here the influence of the old attraction for his mother is still exerting itself. Although some writers, following Goethe,² see in Ophelia many traits of resemblance to the Queen, surely more striking are the traits contrasting with those of the Queen. Whatever truth there may be in the many German conceptions of Ophelia as a sensual wanton³—misconceptions that have been adequately disproved by Loening⁴ and others—still the very fact that it needed what Goethe happily called the "innocence of insanity" to reveal the presence of any such libidinous thoughts in itself demonstrates the modesty and chasteness of her habitual demeanour. Her naïve piety, her obedient resignation and her unreflecting simplicity sharply contrast with the Queen's character, and seem to indicate that Hamlet by a characteristic reaction towards the opposite extreme had unknowingly been impelled to choose a woman who would least remind him of his mother. A case might

¹ Here, as throughout this essay, I closely follow Freud's interpretation given in the footnote previously referred to. He there points out the inadequacy of the earlier explanations, deals with Hamlet's feelings toward his mother, father and uncle, and mentions two other matters that will presently be discussed, the significance of Hamlet's reaction against Ophelia and of the fact that the play was written immediately after the death of Shakspeare's father.

² Goethe: Wilhelm Meister, IV, 14. "Ihr ganzes Wesen schwebt in reifer, süsser Sinnlichkeit." "Ihre Einbildungskraft ist angesteckt, ihre stille Bescheidenheit atmet eine liebevolle Begierde, und sollte die bequeme Göttin Gelegenheit das Bäumschen schütteln, so würde die Frucht sogleich herabfallen."

³ Storrfrich: Psychologische Aufschüsse über Shakespeare's Hamlet, 1859, S. 131; Dietrich, *Op. cit.*, S. 129; Tieck: Dramaturgische Blätter, II, S. 85, etc.

⁴ Loening: *Op. cit.*, Cap. XIII. Charakter und Liebe Ophelias.

further be made out for the view that part of Hamlet's courtship of Ophelia originated not so much in direct attraction for her as in a half-conscious desire to play her off against his mother, just as a disappointed and piqued lover is so often thrown into the arms of a more willing rival. When in the play scene he replies to his mother's request to sit by her with the words, "No, good mother, here's metal more attractive," and proceeds to lie at Ophelia's feet, we seem to have a direct indication of this attitude, and his coarse familiarity and bandying of ambiguous jests with the woman he has recently so ruthlessly jilted are hardly intelligible unless we bear in mind that they were carried out under the heedful gaze of the Queen. It is as though Hamlet is unconsciously expressing to her the following thought: "You give yourself to other men whom you prefer to me. Let me assure you that I can dispense with your favours, and indeed prefer those of a different type of woman."

Now comes the father's death and the mother's second marriage. The long "repressed" desire to take his father's place in his mother's affection is stimulated to unconscious activity by the sight of some one usurping this place exactly as he himself had once longed to do. More, this someone was a member of the same family, so that the actual usurpation further resembled the imaginary one in being incestuous. Without his being at all aware of it these ancient desires are ringing in his mind, are once more struggling to find expression, and need such an expenditure of energy again to "repress" them that he is reduced to the deplorable mental state he himself so vividly depicts. Then comes the Ghost's announcement of the murder. Hamlet, having at the moment his mind filled with natural indignation at the news, answers with (Act I. Sc. 5. l. 29.),

"Haste me to know 't, that I, with wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love,
May sweep to my revenge."

The momentous words follow revealing who was the guilty person, namely a relative who had committed the deed at the bidding of lust.¹ Hamlet's second guilty wish had thus also been realised by his uncle, namely to procure the fulfilment of the first—the replacement of his father—by a personal deed, in fact by murder.² The two recent events, the father's

¹ It is not maintained that this was by any means Claudius' whole motive, but it evidently was a powerful one, and the one that most impressed Hamlet.

² Such murderous thoughts, directed against rival members of the same family, are surprisingly common in children, though of course it is relatively rare that they come to expression. Some years ago, in

death and the mother's second marriage, seemed to the world not to be causally related to each other, but they represented ideas which in Hamlet's unconscious fantasy had for many years been closely associated. These ideas now in a moment forced their way to conscious recognition in spite of all "repressing" forces, and found immediate expression in his almost reflex cry: "O my prophetic soul! My uncle?" For the rest of the interview Hamlet is stunned by the effect of the internal conflict in his mind, which from now on never ceases, and into the nature of which he never penetrates.

One of the first manifestations of the awakening in Hamlet's mind of the old conflict is the reaction against Ophelia. This is doubly conditioned, first by his reaction against woman in general, which culminates in the bitter misogyny of his outburst against her,¹ and secondly by the hypocritical prudishness with which Ophelia follows her father and brother in seeing evil in his natural affection, and which poisons his love in exactly the same way that the love of his childhood had been poisoned. On only one occasion does he for a moment escape from the sordid implication with which his love has been impregnated, and achieve a healthier attitude towards Ophelia, namely at the open grave when in remorse he breaks out at Laertes for presuming to pretend that his feeling for Ophelia could ever equal that of her lover. The intensity of the previous repulsion against woman in general, and Ophelia in particular, is an index of the powerful "repression" to which his sexual feeling is being subjected. The outlet for that feeling in the direction of his mother has always been firmly dammed by the forces making for "repression," and, now that the thin outlet for it in Ophelia's direction has also been closed, the increase of desire in the original direction consequent on the awakening of early memories tasks all his energy to maintain the "repression."

It will be seen from the foregoing that Hamlet's attitude towards his uncle is far more complex than is generally supposed. He of course detests his uncle, but it is the jealous detestation of one evil-doer towards his successful fellow.

two editorial articles entitled "Infant Murderers" in the *Brit. Jour. of Children's Diseases* (Nov., 1904, p. 510, and June, 1905, p. 270), I collected a series of such cases, and, mentioning the constant occurrence of jealousy between young children in the same family, pointed out the possible dangers arising from the non-realisation by children of the significance of death.

¹ Act III, Sc. I, l. 149: "I have heard of your paintings too, well enough; God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another; you jig, you amble, and you lisp, and nickname God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't; it hath made me mad."

Much as he hates him, he can never denounce him with the ardent indignation that boils straight from his blood when he reproaches his mother, for the more vigorously he denounces his uncle the more powerfully does he stimulate to activity his own unconscious and "repressed" complexes. He is therefore in a dilemma between on the one hand allowing his natural detestation of his uncle to have free play, a consummation which would make him aware of his own horrible wishes, and on the other ignoring the imperative call for vengeance that his obvious duty demands. He must either realise his own evil in denouncing his uncle's, or strive to ignore, to condone and if possible even to forget the latter in continuing to "repress" the former; his moral fate is bound up with his uncle's for good or ill. The call of duty to slay his uncle cannot be obeyed because it links itself with the call of his nature to slay his mother's husband, whether this is the first or the second; the latter call is strongly "repressed," and therefore necessarily the former also. It is no mere chance that he says of himself that he is prompted to the revenge "by heaven and hell," though the true significance of the expression of course quite escapes him.

Hamlet's dammed-up feeling finds a partial vent in other directions, the natural one being blocked. The petulant irascibility and explosive outbursts called forth by the vexation of Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, and especially of Polonius, are evidently to be interpreted in this way, as also is in part the burning nature of his reproaches to his mother. Indeed towards the end of the interview with his mother the thought of her misconduct expresses itself in that almost physical disgust which is so often the manifestation of intensely "repressed" sexual feeling.

"Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed;
Pinch wanton on your cheek; call you his mouse;
And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses,
Or paddling in your neck with his damn'd fingers,
Make you to ravel all this matter out."

His attitude towards Polonius is highly instructive. Here the absence of family tie, and of other influences, enables him to indulge to a relatively unrestrained degree his hostility towards the prating and sententious dotard. The analogy he effects between Polonius and Jephthah¹ is in this connection especially pointed. It is here that we see his fundamental attitude towards moralising elders who use their power to

¹ What Shakspeare thought of Jephthah's behaviour towards his daughter may be gathered from a reference in Henry VI, Part III, Act V, Sc. 1. See also on the subject Wordsworth. On Shakespeare's knowledge and use of the Bible, 1864, p. 67.

thwart the happiness of the young, and not in the over-drawn and melodramatic portrait in which he delineates his father: "A combination and a form indeed, where every god did seem to set his seal to give the world assurance of a man."

In this discussion of the motives that move or restrain Hamlet we have purposely depreciated the subsidiary ones, which also play a part, so as to bring out in greater relief the deeper and effective ones that are of preponderating importance. These, as we have seen, spring from sources of which Hamlet is unaware, and we might summarise the internal conflict of which he is a victim as consisting in a struggle of the "repressed" mental processes to become conscious. The call of duty, which automatically arouses to activity these unconscious processes, conflicts with the necessity for "repressing" then still further; for the more urgent is the need for external action the greater is the effort demanded of the "repressing" forces. Action is paralysed at its very inception, and there is thus produced the picture of causeless inhibition which is so inexplicable both to Hamlet¹ and to readers of the play. This paralysis arises, however, not from physical or moral cowardice, but from that intellectual cowardice, that reluctance to dare the exploration of his inner mind, which Hamlet shares with the rest of the human race.

We have finally to return to the subject with which we started, namely poetic creation, and in this connection to enquire into the relation of Hamlet's conflict to the inner workings of Shakspeare's mind. It is here maintained that this conflict is an echo of a similar one in Shakspeare himself,² as to a greater or less extent it is in all men. It is, therefore, as much beside the point to enquire into Shakspeare's conscious intention, moral or otherwise, in the play as it is in the case of most works of genius. The play is the form in which his

¹ The situation is perfectly depicted by Hamlet in his cry (Act IV, Sc. 4.):

"I do not know
Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do,'
Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means,
To do't."

With greater insight he could have replaced the word "will" by "pious wish," which, as Loening (*Op. cit.*, S. 246) points out, it obviously means. Curiously enough, Rolfe (*Op. cit.*, p. 23) quotes this very passage in support of Werder's hypothesis that Hamlet was inhibited by the external difficulties of the situation.

² The view that Shakspeare depicted in Hamlet his own inner self is a wide-spread one. See especially Döring, *Shakespeare's Hamlet seinem Grundgedanken und Inhalte nach erläutert*, 1865; Hermann, *Ergänzungen und Berichtigungen der hergebrachten Shakespeare-Biographie*, 1884; Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*; Vischer, *Altes und Neues*, 1882, Ht. 3.

feeling finds its spontaneous expression, without any inquiry being possible on his part as to the essential nature or source of that feeling.

This conclusion is amply supported by a historical study of the external circumstances of the play. It is well known that Shakspeare took not only the skeleton but also a surprising amount of detail from earlier writings.¹ It is probable that he had read both the original saga as told early in the thirteenth century by Saxo Grammaticus, and the translation and modification of this published by Belleforest.² For at least a dozen years before Shakspeare wrote Hamlet a play of the same name was extant in England, which modern evidence³ has clearly shewn to have been written by Thomas Kyd. Ruder accounts of the story, of Irish and Norse origin, were probably still more widely spread in England, and the name Hamlet itself, or some modification of it, was very common in the Stratford district;⁴ as is well known, Shakspeare in 1585 christened his own son Hamnet, a frequent variation of the name. Thus the plot of the tragedy must have been present in his mind for some years before it actually took form as a play. In all probability this was in the winter of 1601-2, for the play was registered on July 26, 1602, and the first, piratical, edition appeared in quarto in 1603. Highly suggestive, therefore, of the subjective origin of the psychical conflict in the play is the fact that it was in September, 1601, that Shakspeare's father died, an event which might well have had the same awakening effect on old "repressed" memories that the death of Hamlet's father had with Hamlet; his mother lived till some seven years later. There are many indications that the disposition of Shakspeare's father was of that masterful and authoritative kind so apt to provoke rebellion, particularly in a first-born son.

¹ No doubt much detail was also introduced by Shakspeare from personal experience. For instance there is much evidence to shew that in painting the character of Hamlet he had in mind some of his contemporaries, notably William Herbert, later Lord Pembroke, (Döring, *Hamlet*, 1898, S. 35) and Robert Essex (Isaac, *Hamlet's Familie*. Shakespeare's Jahrbuch, Bd. XVI, S. 274). The repeated allusion to the danger of Ophelia's conceiving illegitimately may be connected with both Herbert, who was imprisoned for being the father of an illegitimate child, and the poet himself, who hastily married in order to avoid the same stigma.

² Belleforest: *Histoires tragiques*, T. V., 1564. This translation was made from the Italian of Bandello.

³ See Fleay: *Chronicle of the English Drama*, 1891; Sarrazin: *Thomas Kyd und sein Kreis*, 1892; and Corbin: *The Elizabethan Hamlet*, 1895.

⁴ Elton: *William Shakespeare. His Family and Friends*, 1904, p. 223.

It is for two reasons desirable here to interpolate a short account of the mythological relations of the original Hamlet legend, first so as to observe the personal contribution to it made by Shakspeare, and secondly because knowledge of it serves to confirm and expand the psychological interpretation given above. Up to the present point in this essay an attempt has been made to drive the argument along a dry, logical path, and to shew that all the explanations of the mystery prior to Freud's end in blind alleys. So far as I can see, there is no escape possible from the conclusion that the cause of Hamlet's hesitancy lies in some unconscious source of repugnance to his task; the next step of the argument, however, in which is supplied a motive for this repugnance, is avowedly based on considerations that are not generally appreciated, though I have tried to minimise the difficulty by assimilating the argument to some commonly accepted facts. Now, there is another point of view from which this labour would have been superfluous, in that Freud's explanation would appear directly obvious. To any one familiar with the modern interpretation, based on psycho-analytic study, of myths and legends, that explanation of the Hamlet problem would immediately occur on the first reading through of the play. The reason why this strong statement can be made is that the story of Hamlet is merely an unusually elaborated form of a vast group of legends, the psychological significance of which is now, thanks to Freud and his co-workers, quite plain. It would absorb too much space to discuss in detail the historical relationship of the Hamlet legend to the other members of this group, and I shall here content myself with pointing out the psychological resemblances; Jiriczek¹ and Lessmann² have adduced much evidence to shew that the Norse and Irish variants of it are descended from the ancient Iranian legend of Kaikhosrav, and there is no doubt of the antiquity of the whole group, some members of which can be traced back for several thousand years.³

The theme common to all the members of the group is the success of a young hero in displacing a rival father. In its simplest form the hero is persecuted by a tyrannical father who has been warned of his approaching eclipse, but after marvelously escaping from various dangers he avenges himself, often

¹ Jiriczek: Hamlet in Iran., Zeitschr. des Vereins für Volkskunde, 1900, Bd. X.

² Lessmann: Die Kyrossage in Europa. Wissenschaftliche Beil. z. Jahresbericht d. städt. Realschule zu Charlottenburg, 1906.

³ In the exposition of this group of myths I am especially indebted to Otto Rank's excellent volume, *Der Mythos von der Geburt des Helden*, 1909, in which the original references may also be found.

unwittingly, by slaying the father. The persecution mainly takes the form of attempts to destroy the hero's life just after his birth, by orders that he is to be drowned, exposed to cold and starvation, or otherwise done away with. A good instance of this simple form is the Œdipus legend, in which the underlying motive is betrayed by the hero subsequently marrying his mother; the same occurs in the many Christian variants of this legend, for example, in the Judas Iscariot and St. Gregory ones. The intimate relation of the hero to the mother is also shewn in certain types of the legend (for example, the Ferdun, Perseus and Telephos ones) by the fact that the mother and son are together exposed to the same dangers. In some types the hostility towards the father is the predominating theme, in others the affection for the mother, but as a rule both of these are more or less plainly to be traced.

The elaboration of the more complex variants of the myth is brought about chiefly by three factors, namely: an increasing degree of distortion engendered by greater psychological "repression," complication of the main theme by other allied ones, and expansion of the story by repetition due to the creator's decorative fancy. In giving a description of these three processes it is difficult sharply to separate them, but they will all be illustrated in the following examples.

The *first* disturbing factor, that of more pronounced "repression," manifests itself by the same mechanisms that Freud has described in connection with normal dreams,¹ psychoneurotic symptoms, etc. The most interesting of these mechanisms in myth formation is that of "decomposition" (*Auseinanderlegung*), which is the opposite to the "condensation" (*Verdichtung*) mechanism so characteristic of normal dreams. Whereas in the latter process attributes of several individuals are fused in the creation of one figure, much as in the production of a composite photograph, in the former process various attributes of a given person are disunited and several individuals are invented, each endowed with one group of the original attributes. In this way one person, of complex character, gets replaced by several, each of whom possesses a different aspect of the character that in a simpler form of the myth was combined in one being; usually the different individuals closely resemble one another in other respects, for instance in age. A good example of this process is seen by the figure of the tyrannical father becoming split into two, a father and a tyrant. The resolution of the original figure is most often incomplete, so that the two resulting ones stand in a close relation to each other, being indeed as a rule members of the same

¹ See Abraham: *Traum und Mythos*, 1908.

family. The tyrant who seeks to destroy the hero is then most commonly the grandfather, as in the legends of Cyrus, Gilgam, Perseus, Telephos and others, or the grand-uncle, as in those of Romulus and Remus and their Greek predecessors, Amphion and Zethos; less often is he the uncle, as in the Hamlet legend. When the decomposition is more complete, the tyrant is not of the same family as the father, though he may be socially related, as in the case of Abraham whose father Therachs was the tyrant Nimrod's commander-in-chief; as a rule the tyrant is in this sub-group a stranger, as in the cases of Moses and Pharaoh, Feridun and Zohäk, Jesus and Herod, and others. In the last two instances, and in many others, not only are the mother and son, but also the father, persecuted by the tyrant, and we thus reach a still more complex variant, well represented by the Feridun legend, in which the son adores his father and avenges him by slaying their common enemy. The picture of the son as avenger instead of as slayer of the father therefore illustrates the highest degree of psychological "repression," in which the true meaning of the story is concealed by the identical mechanism that in real life conceals "repressed" hostility and jealousy in so many families, namely, exaggerated solicitude, care and respect. The dutiful Laertes avenging his murdered father Polonius is probably also an instance of the same stage in the development of the myth. Suppressed hate towards a father would seem to be adequately concealed by being thus masked by devotion and desire to avenge, and Shakspeare's modification of the Hamlet legend is the only instance in which intense "repression" has produced still further distortion of the hero's attitude; in this legend, however, the matter is more complicated by the unusual prominence of the love for the mother over the hate for the father, and by the appearance of other factors such as the relationship of the tyrant to the father and to the mother.

Not only may the two above-mentioned attributes of the parent, fatherliness and tyranny, be split off so as to give rise to the creation of separate figures, but others also. For instance, the power and authority of the parent may be invested in the person of a king or other distinguished man, who may be contrasted with the lowly-born father.¹ In the present legend I think it probable that the figure of Polonius may be thus regarded as resulting from "decomposition" of the parental archetype, and as representing a certain group of qualities which the young not infrequently find an irritating feature in

¹This important theme, which is fully dealt with by Freud and Rank, I have not here discussed, for it does not enter into the present legend. Abraham (*Op. cit.*, S. 40) has interestingly pointed out the significance of it in the development of paranoiac delusions.

their elders. The senile nonentity, concealed behind a show of fussy pomposity, who has developed a rare capacity to bore his audience with the repetition of sententious platitudes in which profound ignorance of life is but thinly disguised by a would-be worldly-wise air; the prying busybody whose meddling is, as usual, excused by his "well-meaning" intentions, constitutes a figure that is sympathetic only to those who submissively accept the world's estimate concerning the superiority of the merely decrepit.

The *second* disturbing factor is that due to the interweaving of the main theme of jealousy and incest between parent and child with other allied ones of a similar kind. We noted above that in the simplest form of decomposition of the paternal attributes the tyrannical *rôle* is most often relegated to the grandfather. It is no mere chance that this is so, and it is not fully to be accounted for by incompleteness of the decomposition. There is a deeper reason why the grandfather is most often chosen to play the part of tyrant, and this will be readily perceived when we recollect the large number of legends in which he has previously interposed all manner of obstacles to the marriage of his daughter. He opposes the advances of the would-be suitor, sets in his way various apparently impossible tasks and conditions—usually these are miraculously carried out by the lover,—and even locks up his daughter in an inaccessible spot, as in the legends of Gilgames, Perseus, Romulus, Telephos and others. The motive is at bottom that he grudges to give up his daughter to another man, not wishing to part with her himself (Father-daughter complex). When his commands are disobeyed or circumvented, his love for his daughter turns to bitterness, and he pursues her and her offspring with insatiable hate. We are here once more reminded of events that may be observed in daily life by those who open their eyes to the facts. When the grandson in the myth avenges himself and his mother by slaying her tyrannical father, it is as though he clearly realised the motive of the persecution, for in truth he slays the man who endeavoured to possess and retain the mother's affection; thus in this sense we again come back to the father, and see that from the hero's point of view the distinction between the father and grandfather is not so radical as it at first sight appears. We perceive, therefore, that for two reasons the resolution of the original parent into a kind father and a tyrannical grandfather is not a very extensive one.

The foregoing considerations throw more light on the figure of Polonius in the present legend. In his attitude towards the relation between Ophelia and Hamlet are many of the traits that we have just mentioned to be characteristic of the Father-

daughter complex, though by the mechanism of rationalisation they are here skilfully cloaked under the guise of worldly-wise advice. Hamlet's resentment towards him is thus doubly conditioned, in that first Polonius, by the mechanism of "decomposition," personates a group of obnoxious elderly attributes, and secondly presents the equally objectionable attitude of the dog-in-the-manger father who grudges to others what he possesses, but cannot enjoy, himself. In this way, therefore, Polonius represents the repellant characteristics of both the father and the grandfather of mythology, and we are not surprised to find that, just as Perseus accidentally slew his grandfather Acrisios, who had locked up his daughter Danae so as to preserve her virginity, so does Hamlet "accidentally" slay Polonius, by a deed that resolves the situation as correctly from the dramatic as from the mythological point of view. With truth has this act been called the turning point of the play, for from then on the tragedy relentlessly proceeds to its culmination in the doom of the hero and his adversary.

The characteristics that constitute the Father-daughter complex are found in a similar one, the Brother-sister complex. This also may be seen in the present play, where the attitude of Laertes towards his sister Ophelia is quite indistinguishable from that of their father Polonius. Further, Hamlet not only keenly resents Laertes' open expression of his devoted affection for Ophelia—in the grave scene,—but at the end of the play kills him, as he had previously killed Polonius, in an accurate consummation of the mythological motive. That the Brother-sister complex was operative in the formation of the Hamlet legend is also evidenced by the incest between Claudius and the Queen, for from a religious point of view the two stood to each other in exactly the same relationship as do brother and sister. This conclusion may further be supported by the following—avowedly more tentative—considerations. The preceding remark about the two main traits in Polonius, those characteristic of a pompous father of a son and a grudging father of a daughter, gives room for the supposition that his family was in a sense a rough duplicate of the main family in the legend. This notion of duplication of the principal characters will be mentioned in more detail in the next paragraph, and the present line of thought will then perhaps become clearer. In the sense here taken Laertes would therefore represent a brother of Hamlet, and Ophelia a sister. This being so, we would seem to trace a still deeper ground for the original motives of both Hamlet's misogynous turning from Ophelia, and his jealous resentment of Laertes. As, however, this theme of the relation between siblings is of only secondary interest in the Hamlet legend, discussion of it will be reserved

for other legends in which it is more prominent (*e. g.*, those of Cyrus, Karna, etc.).

The *third* factor to be considered is the process technically known to mythologists as "doubling" of the principal characters. The chief motive for its occurrence seems to be the desire to exalt the importance of these, and especially to glorify the hero, by decoratively filling in the stage with lay figures of colourless copies whose neutral movements contrast with the vivid activities of the principals. This factor is sometimes hard to distinguish from the first one, for a given multiplication of figures may subserve at the same time the function of decomposition and that of doubling. In general it may be said that the former function is more often fulfilled by the creation of a new person who is a relative of the principal characters, the latter by the creation of a person who is not a relative; this rule however has many exceptions. In the present legend Claudius seems to subserve both functions, and it is interesting to note that in many legends it is not the father's figure who is doubled by the creation of a brother, but the grandfather's. This is so in some versions of the Perseus legend, and, as was mentioned above, in those of Romulus and Amphion; in all three of these the creation of the king's brother, as in the Hamlet legend, subserves the functions of both decomposition and doubling. Good instances of the simple doubling processes are seen in the case of the maid of Pharaoh's daughter in the Moses legend, or of many of the figures in the Cyrus one.¹ Perhaps the purest examples of doubling in the present play are the colourless copies of Hamlet presented by the figures of Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo. Laertes and the younger Fortinbras, on the other hand, are examples of both doubling and decomposition of the main figure. The figure of Laertes is more complex than that of Fortinbras in that it is composed of three components instead of two; he evinces, namely, the influence of the Brother-sister complex in a way that contrasts with the "repressed" form in which this is manifested in the central figures of the play. Hamlet's jealousy of Laertes' interference in connection with Ophelia is further to be compared with his resentment of the meddling of Guildenstern and Rosencrantz. These are therefore only copies of the Brother of mythology, and, like him, are killed by the hero; in them is further to be detected a play on the "Twin" motive so often found in mythology, but which need not be further developed here. Both Laertes and Fortinbras represent one "decomposed" aspect of the hero, namely that concerned with revenge for a murdered or injured father.

¹ This is very clearly pointed out by Rank, *Op. cit.*, S. 84, 85.

It is instructive to note that neither of them shew any sign of inhibition in the performance of this task, and that with neither is any reference made to his mother. In Hamlet, on the other hand, in whom "repressed" love for the mother is even more powerful than "repressed" hostility towards the father, inhibition appears; this is because the stronger complex is stimulated by the fact that the object of revenge owes his guilt to the desire to win the mother.

The important subject of the actual mode of origin of myths and legends, and the relation of them to infantile fantasies, will not here be considered,¹ as our interest in the topic is secondary to the main one of the play of Hamlet as given to us by Shakspeare. Enough perhaps has been said of the comparative mythology of the Hamlet legend to shew that in it are to be found ample indications of the working of all forms of incestuous fantasy. We may summarise the foregoing considerations of this part of the subject by saying that the main theme of this story is a highly elaborated and distorted account of a boy's love for his mother and consequent jealousy of and hostility towards his father; the allied one in which the sister and brother respectively play the same part as the mother and father in the main theme is also told, though with secondary interest.

Last of all in this connection may be mentioned on account of its general psychological interest a matter which has provoked much discussion, namely Hamlet's so-called "simulation of madness."² The traits in Hamlet's behaviour thus designated are brought to expression by Shakspeare in such a refined and subtle way as to be not very transpicuous unless one studies them in the original saga. In the play Hamlet's feigning mainly takes the form of fine irony, and serves the purpose of enabling him to express contempt and hostility in an indirect and disguised form (*indirekte Darstellung*). His conversations with Polonius beautifully illustrate this mechanism. The irony in the play is a transmutation of the still more concealed mode of expression adopted in the saga, where the hero's audience commonly fails to apprehend his meaning. Of this, Saxo Grammaticus writes.³ "Falsitatis alienus haberi cupiens, ita astutiam veriloquio permiscebat, ut nec dictis veritas deesset nec acuminis modus verorum indicio proderetur." Here Hamlet plainly adopts his curious behaviour in order to further his scheme of revenge, to which, as we shall presently note, he had

¹Those interested in this subject are referred to the writings of Freud, Abraham, Rank and Riklin.

²My attention was kindly called to this point by a personal communication from Professor Freud.

³Quoted after Loening: *Op. cit.*, S. 249.

in the saga whole-heartedly devoted himself. The actual mode of operation of his simulation here is very instructive to observe, for it gives us the clue to a deeper psychological interpretation of the process. His conduct in this respect has three characteristics, first the obscure and disguised manner of speech just referred to, secondly a demeanour of indolent inertia and purposelessness, and thirdly conduct of childish and at times almost imbecillic foolishness (*Dummstellen*); the third of these is well exemplified by the way he rides into the palace seated backwards on a donkey. His motive in so acting was, by playing the part of a harmless fool, to deceive the king and court as to his projects of revenge, and unobserved to get to know their plans and intentions; in this he admirably succeeded. It has been maintained that even in the play this motive of spying on the king and disarming his suspicions was at work, but even if this was the case, and there are grave reasons for doubting it,¹ it is certainly more evident in the saga. Now, in observing the kind of foolishness simulated by Hamlet in the saga, we cannot help being impressed by the *childish* characteristics it throughout manifests, and Freud points out how accurately it resembles a certain type of demeanour adopted at times by some children. The motive with these children is further a like one, namely to simulate innocence and an exaggerated childishness, even foolishness, in order to delude their elders into regarding them as being "too young to understand" and even into altogether ignoring their presence. The reason for the artifice with such children most frequently is that by this means they may view and overhear various private things which they are not supposed to. It need hardly be said that the curiosity thus indulged in is in most cases concerned with matters of a directly sexual nature; even marital embraces are in this way investigated by quite young children far more frequently than is generally supposed. The subject is one that would bear much exposition, but it would be too far from the main theme of this essay to render justifiable its inclusion here.

It is highly instructive now to note the respects in which Shakspeare's plot deviates from that of the original saga; we are, of course, not here concerned with the poetic and literary representation, which not merely revived an old story, but created an entirely new work of genius. The changes are mainly two² in number. The first is as follows: in the saga Claudius

¹ See on the point Loening. *Loc. cit.*, and S. 387.

² Lesser points, important as they are, cannot here be followed out. Such is for instance the way Shakspeare accepts Belleforest's alteration of the original saga in making the Queen commit incest during the life of her first husband. The significance of this will be obvious to those who have followed the argument above presented.

(or Fengo, as he is here called) had murdered his brother in public, so that the deed was generally known, and further had with lies and false witnesses sought to justify it in that he pretended it was done to save the Queen from the threats of her husband.¹ This view he successfully imposed on the nation so that, as Belleforest² has it, "son peché trouva excuse à l'endroit du peuple et fut réputé comme justice envers la noblesse —et qu'au reste, en lieu de le poursuyvre comme parricide³ et incestueux, chacun des courtisans luy applaudissoit et le flattoit en sa fortune prospere." When Shakspeare altered this to a secret murder known only to Hamlet it would seem as though it was done, consciously or unconsciously, to minimise the external difficulties of Hamlet's task, for it is obviously harder to rouse a nation to condemn a crime that has been openly explained and universally forgiven than one which has been guiltily concealed. If Shakspeare had retained the original plot in this respect there would have been more excuse for the Klein-Werder hypothesis, though it is to be observed that even in the saga Hamlet unhesitatingly executed his task, herculean as it was. Shakspeare's rendering makes still more conspicuous Hamlet's recalcitrancy, in that it disposes of the only justifiable plea for non-action.

The second and all-important respect in which Shakspeare changed the story, and thus revolutionised the tragedy, is the vacillation and hesitancy he introduced into Hamlet's attitude towards his task, with the consequent paralysis of his action. In all the previous versions Hamlet was throughout a man of rapid decision and action, not—as with Shakspeare's version—in everything except in the task of vengeance. He had, as Shakspeare's Hamlet felt he should have, swept to his revenge unimpeded by any doubts or scruples, and had never flinched from the straightforward path of duty. With him duty and natural inclination went hand in hand; from his heart he wanted to do that which he believed he ought to do, and was thus harmoniously impelled by both the summons of his conscience and the cry of his blood. There was none of the deep-reaching conflict that was so disastrous to Shakspeare's Hamlet. It

¹Those who are acquainted with Freud's work will have no difficulty in discerning the sadistic origin of this pretext. (See *Sammlung kleiner Schriften*, Zweite Folge, 1909, S. 169.) The interpretation of an overheard coitus as an act of violence offered to the mother is frequently an aggravating cause of hostility towards the father.

²Quoted after Loening, *Op. cit.*, S. 248.

³This should of course be fratricide, though the word parricide was occasionally used in old French to denote a murder of any elder relative. It is conceivable that the mistake is a "*Verschreiben*," unconsciously motived in Freud's sense. (See *Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens*, 1907, Cap. VI.)

is as though Shakspeare had read the previous story and realised that had *he* been placed in a similar situation he would not have found the path of action so obvious as was supposed, but on the contrary would have been torn in a conflict which was all the more intense for the fact that he could not explain its nature. In this transformation Shakspeare exactly reversed the plot of the tragedy, for, whereas in the saga this consisted in the overcoming of external difficulties and dangers by a single-hearted hero, in the play these are removed and the plot lies in the fateful unrolling of the consequences that result from an internal conflict in the hero's soul. From the struggles of the hero issue dangers which at first did not exist, but which, as the effect of his untoward essays, loom increasingly portentous until at the end they close and involve him in final destruction. More than this, every action he so reluctantly engages in for the fulfilment of his obvious task seems half-wittingly to be disposed in such a way as to provoke destiny, in that, by arousing the suspicion and hostility of his enemy, it defeats its own object and helps to encompass his own ruin. The conflict in his soul is to him insoluble, and the only steps he can make are those that inexorably draw him nearer and nearer to his doom. In him, as in every victim of a powerful unconscious conflict, the Will to Death is fundamentally stronger than the Will to Life, and his struggle is at heart one long despairing fight against suicide, the least intolerable solution of the problem. Being unable to free himself from the ascendancy of his past he is necessarily impelled by Fate along the only path he can travel—to Death. In thus vividly exhibiting the desperate but unavailing struggle of a strong man against Fate, Shakspeare achieved the very essence of the Greek conception of tragedy.

There is therefore reason to believe that the new life which Shakspeare poured into the old tragedy was the outcome of inspirations that took their origin in the deepest and most hidden parts of his mind. He responded to the peculiar appeal of the story by projecting into it his profoundest thoughts in a way that has ever since wrung wonder from all who have heard or read the tragedy. It is only fitting that the greatest work of the world-poet should have been concerned with the deepest problem and the intensest conflict that has occupied the mind of man since the beginning of time, the revolt of youth and of the impulse to love against the restraints imposed by the jealous eld.